

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Many rural municipalities have a shrinking population, an increased share of elderly and a decreasing share of young people. This is also frequent in mountain municipalities. Shrinkage causes economic problems and a need to reduce (adjust) public services or centralise them within the municipality. This is painful to local communities. Another issue is over-investments, based on the illusion of a population growth that does not come. This often accelerates economic problems.

The actions of the municipalities are typically “fire-fighting” due to no long-term plans having shrinkage as a point of departure. They do also have problems because the administration is often small and occupied with mandatory duties, leaving less room for planned development following new paths. Municipal master planning is generally based on the wish for growth, fronted by the politicians, despite that local administration often looks for another approach, such as a planned degrowth. Degrowth does not mean no development, but is an approach emphasizing other aspects than growth, such as the good life and sustainability.

Such an approach is challenged by several issues, amongst others how the municipalities and the inhabitants view themselves and rurality. Planning in general is based on urban values, concepts and growth, and an urban view on sustainable development. Planning in rural areas is imprinted by the same approach, the urban questions related to sustainable development and the urban answers. An example is to centralise and concentrate built-up areas to reduce transport and emissions. This may be against the aspects favouring the rural life and the broader spectre of sustainability issues.

Rural planning for shrinkage may therefore need to view the world from the rural point of view and define it on its own terms, and not solely as the contrast to urbanity and growth. A first step is to define rurality - from a rural point of view. Subsequently to develop planning having shrinkage as point of view and how that approach may lead to a planning for degrowth based on the broad aspects of sustainability and the good life in e.g. the mountains.

There are hardly any examples of such broad planning approaches, but several pieces to the puzzle exist in the literature and in practical planning. We will arrange them in a way that hopefully increase the understanding and the possibility to develop a long-term planning based on shrinkage that advances suitability and a good life in the mountains.